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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: Enhancing Regional Cooperation to Support UNPKO

REF: PHNOM PENH 275

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Peacekeeping experts representing Asia Regional Forum participating countries recently gathered together to discuss enhancing regional capacity to participate in UN peacekeeping operations. Cambodia's co-hosting of the event highlights its expanding role in international peacekeeping operations, as Cambodia prepares to deploy troops to support the new United Nations peacekeeping missions in Chad and the Central African Republic. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) co-hosted with Japan the third annual Asia Regional Forum (ARF) Peacekeeping Experts' Meeting in Siem Reap June 24-26. Participants included representatives from most of the ARF member countries, who were eager to share experiences and best practices, and discussed how improved regional cooperation could better support the UN peacekeeping operations (PKO) missions and mandates.

Current Challenges

¶3. (SBU) Participants acknowledged the current challenges facing UNPKO missions, particularly given the growing demand for PKO missions with increasingly complex and multidimensional mandates, which are complicated by limited human and financial resources. Keynote speaker Ms. Sunaina Lowe, Coordination Officer for the Policy, Evaluation, and Training Division, UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations' (UNDPKO), described an "overstretch" situation resulting in part from eight new and expanded missions in the last five years, an ad hoc system with rigid and inflexible rules, and varied sources of resources (personnel and equipment) which create challenges to interoperability and sustainability. Questions raised by participants concerning the relationship between PKO, peace building, and special political missions -- and in particular their distinctions -- illustrate the broader scope and increasingly complex range of tasks that PKOs are asked to undertake.

¶4. (SBU) Achieving rapid deployment of forces was of particular concern to the peacekeeping experts, who noted that fast and effective deployment and a strategic reserve is fundamental to the credibility of UN PKO missions. Ms Lowe dismissed the suggestion for the creation of specific UN peacekeeping forces as "not politically feasible." She explained that the UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS) was intended to facilitate a rapid response to crisis, but conceded that in practice this is not possible. She noted that it is difficult for contributing countries to commit to a mission without knowing where their troops will be deployed, and some countries have not lived up to their commitments or have requested payment for their standby forces which are kept in reserve.

Regional Cooperation is Part of Solution

15. (SBU) Participants agreed that greater regional cooperation is one method to help address the current challenges of increasingly complex and varied mandates for peacekeeping missions. Several experts shared their country's PKO experiences and their best practices for successful deployments. Many of the countries represented have their own peacekeeping training centers. Indonesia in particular shared their plans to transform their national peacekeeping center into a regional center and highlighted their hosting of the Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) Capstone Garuda Shield exercise this year. [Note: Cambodia will host the GPOI Capstone Exercise (Angkor Sentinel) in July 2010. End Note.]

16. (SBU) Robert Sweeney, USPACOM GPOI Program Manager, provided an overview of GPOI and its objective to build the capacity of contributing countries to provide training and GPOI support for the annual Capstone exercises, the largest multilateral peacekeeping exercise in the region. He emphasized the role that ARF can play by linking national peacekeeping programs within the region to create better interoperability and increase the speed of deployments (he noted that it generally takes six months to transform a military unit into a peacekeeping unit).

17. (SBU) The International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centers (IAPTC) was highlighted as another mechanism which could help to foster improved regional cooperation. Group Captain Keith Brackenbury, Director of the Australian Peacekeeping Center, explained that the IAPTC serves as a forum for exchanging

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experience, developing training standards and requirements, networking, and promoting better understanding of peacekeeping, its goals, objectives, and methods for training. There are currently region chapters for Europe, Africa, and Americas, but he noted that an Asia-Pacific grouping is still lacking. He encouraged the continued strong involvement by Asia-Pacific countries and urged participants to attend the next annual conference which will be held in Sydney later in 2009.

Cambodia's Expanding PKO

18. (U) Cambodia's co-hosting the conference highlights the Royal Government of Cambodia's (RGC) contributions to UNPKO. Since 2006, approximately 400 Cambodian deminers have served as part of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Sudan. At the ARF PKO conference, Prak Sakhonn, President of the National Coordination Committee for Sending Troops to UNPKO, announced that the Cambodian contingent to the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT) would now be a Movement Control Platoon only, and is scheduled to deploy in January 2010. (Note: Originally, the RGC planned to deploy two units in support of MINURCAT: a 125-person Military Police Company and a 40-person Movement Control Platoon for two six-month rotations. End Note.)

19. (SBU) Discussions with UNDPKO at the conference noted a lack of French speakers within the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces. Since MINURCAT is a Francophone mission, RGC can only field a Movement Control Platoon with the number of French speakers assigned to their PKO Center. The new deployment date, pushed back from the original July timeframe, now allows GPOI to form a pre-deployment training team to more adequately prepare the unit for this role. (Comment: The RGC likely has a sufficient number of French speakers throughout the armed forces to fulfill the key leader billets for both a Military Police Company and a Movement Control Platoon, though this would require a level of cooperation and coordination between various elements of the armed forces that currently does not exist. End comment.)

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